

# Vietnam Veterans Memorial to be unveiled Saturday

By Laura F. Alix

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COVENTRY — The first stand-alone memorial honoring the 612 Connecticut soldiers who gave their lives in the Vietnam War will be unveiled during a ceremony Saturday, thanks in large part to the work of Jean Risley.

Risley, of Coventry, formed the Connecticut Vietnam Veterans Memorial Committee in July 2006 to raise money for a memorial to Connecticut's soldiers who died in Vietnam.

She was primarily inspired by the memory of her brother, Robert Tillquist, who is one of the 612.

The committee has raised more than \$50,000 through a variety of fundraisers, such as a motorcycle run, spaghetti dinners, and a memorial picnic.

Clark and Riley Memorials of Manchester constructed the memorial at a cost of about \$38,000.

The memorial has been placed on the Veterans' Memorial Green at Patriot's Park.

Risley said the memorial is made of four panels of jet-black South African granite, is about 14 feet

long, and stands nearly 7 feet tall at its highest point.

The two center panels are inscribed with the names of the 612 soldiers, and the end panels are etched with images of the Vietnam Nurses' Memorial and the Three Soldiers statue in Washington, D.C., Risley said.

The memorial also features a cobblestone patio and granite benches. Risley said the Lions Club donated flagpoles to the project.

"I think the memorial is absolutely stunning. It is fitting. It is proper," former Town Councilman Tom Pope said.

"Somebody told me it's going to be lit, and my first thought was that it faces the south, and as the sun moves across the sky, lit or not, it will have God's eternal light on it," he said.

"It's a long time coming, and I applaud Jean Risley for doing this," he said.

A dedication ceremony is scheduled for Saturday, beginning at 12:30 p.m. in the Patriot's Park Band Shell at 126 Lake St.

The First Company Governor's Foot Guard Band will play a half-

hour concert of military music before the formal ceremony begins at 1 p.m.

Rep. Joan A. Lewis, D-Coventry, will serve as master of ceremonies, and speakers will include Attorney General Richard Blumenthal, State Comptroller Nancy Wyman, Department of Veterans' Affairs Commissioner Linda Schwartz, U.S. Rep. Joseph D. Courtney, D-2nd District, and Rep. Ted Graziani.

The ceremony will be followed by the unveiling of the memorial and the reading of the 612 names.

Refreshments follow at the Patriot's Park community center.

No pets or alcohol will be allowed in the area of Patriot's Park. Handicapped parking will be available at Patriot's Park.

Parking is available at G.H. Robertson School at 227 Cross St. People also may park at Captain Nathan Hale Middle School or town hall and take a shuttle bus to the park, beginning at 10:30 a.m. Once these lots are full, the shuttle bus will begin picking up people from St. Mary Church at 1600 Main St.

Roads to be closed to normal traffic beginning at 11 a.m. are: Lake Street at Main Street (Route 31), Lake Street at Monument Hill Road, Cross Street at the state boat launch, Cross Street at Bissell Road, Cross Street at South Street, High Street at Cross Street, High Street at Snake Hill Road.

Shuttle buses will make a limited return run at the conclusion of the formal program and before the reading of the 612 names. These buses will be located at the Coventry Flea Market on Lake Street. Shuttle buses will be offered again at the conclusion of the program beginning around 3:45 p.m.